

What is claimed is:

CLAIMS:

1. A business system comprising

a magnetic strip card with consumer identifying information encoded thereon
5 said information identifying a consumer desiring to conduct a transaction with a vendor,
a host system that maintains information about discounts from said vendor,
an apparatus for reading information on the magnetic strip card, said
apparatus interconnected with and in communication with the host system, and
means for applying any applicable discount related to said transaction for the
10 benefit of said consumer.

2. The system of claim 1 wherein the apparatus for reading the information is located
at a location of the vendor.

15 3. The system of claim 1 wherein the apparatus for reading the information is located
at a location of the consumer.

4. The system of claim 3 further comprising

20 a computer at the location of the consumer for the consumer to communicate
with the host system.

5. The system of claim 4 further comprising

means for automatically downloading information to the computer without
a request from the consumer.

25 6. The system of claim 1 further comprising

means at the host system for receiving from the vendor transaction
information about said transaction, and

means at the host system for storing said transaction information.

7. The system of claim 6 further comprising
means for calculating a future discount for the consumer based on the transaction information.

5 8. The system of claim 7 further comprising
means for providing the consumer with information about the future discount.

9. The system of claim 7 further comprising
means for calculating an amount of a retirement account contribution for a consumer based on the transaction information.

10 10. The system of claim 9 further comprising
means for making a contribution to a retirement account of the consumer based on the calculated amount.

15 11. The system of claim 4 further comprising
means for providing the consumer with a physical coupon for use in a transaction with the vendor.

12. The system of claim 1 further comprising
means for determining a pertinent geographic area for the consumer.

20 13. The system of claim 12 further comprising
means for displaying for the consumer information about the vendor for the determined pertinent geographic area.

25 14. The system of claim 12 further comprising
means for displaying for the consumer information about a desired product or service available in the pertinent geographic area.

30 15. The system of claim 12 further comprising
means for automatically determining the pertinent geographic area based on information about a consumer.

16. The system of claim 15 wherein the information about the consumer includes a phone number used by the consumer to contact the host system.

5 17. The system of claim 4 wherein the consumer uses the Internet global communications system to contact the host system.

10 18. The system of claim 4 further comprising means for automatically downloading to the computer information about a vendor without a request from the consumer.

15 19. A business system comprising
a magnetic strip card with consumer identifying information encoded thereon
said information identifying a consumer desiring to conduct a transaction with a vendor,
a host system that maintains information about discounts from said vendor,
an apparatus for reading information on the magnetic strip card, said
apparatus interconnected with and in communication with the host system,
means for applying any applicable discount related to said transaction for the
benefit of said consumer,

20 a computer at the location of the consumer for the consumer to communicate
with the host system,

means for automatically downloading information to the computer without
a request from the consumer,

25 means at the host system for receiving from the vendor transaction
information about said transaction,

means at the host system for storing said transaction information,

means for calculating an amount of a retirement account contribution for a
consumer based on the transaction information,

means for determining a pertinent geographic area for the consumer, and

30 means for automatically determining the pertinent geographic area based on
information about a consumer to contact the host system.

20. Every patentable invention disclosed herein.

21. A business system comprising,

a magnetic strip card with consumer-identifying information encoded thereon;

5 a host system that maintains information about discounts from vendors;

an apparatus for reading information on the magnetic strip card, the apparatus in communication with the host system and a payment processing system, the apparatus capable of initiating a real-time communication link with the host system and initiating a communication link to the payment processing system; and

10 wherein the host system maintains information about discounts from vendors and applies such discount on an itemized basis for the benefit of a consumer when the consumer purchases a discounted item at a vendor using the magnetic strip card.

22. A method for carrying out a purchase comprising the steps of:

15 reading at a point-of-sale terminal located at a vendor consumer-identifying information encoded on a device having a readable data string;

maintaining a database of discounts available at the vendor;

determining on a real-tiem basis whether the items purchased by the consumer are items offered at a discount by the vendor; and

20 transmitting a signal to the vendor to cause a discount to such items purchased by the consumer on an itemized basis that are identified in the database as being offered by the vendor at a discount.